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ABSTRACT

Systematic vocabulary instruction accelerates reading progress: improves one's thought processes: and provides progress in originality, organization, and choice of words. Some school districts have experimented, with some success, with teaching Latin as a way of improving vocabulary. In addition, several studies have indicated the value of a structural approach tc vocabulary develcpment using some basic knowledge of Latin. Etymological studies and reading mythology are two specific ways that vocabulary development can be enhanced by a knowledge of Latin. Other techniques utilizing knowledge of Latin root words and combining them with prefixes and suffixes can be used to increase students' vocabularies. (TJ)

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THE ROLE OF LATIN IN VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

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Words are the means by which we communicate. A good vocabulary is vital to understanding others and expressing oneself. Vocabulary is an inner resource which makes life richer. The more words a person knows, the more ideas he has. A wide meaning vocabulary is essential in reading, thinking, and social understanding. One's knowledge of words is closely linked to his ability to comprehend.

The four types of vocabulary - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - are highly interrelated. One's hearing vocabulary develops first. Throughout life the number of words to which a person can appropriately react when he hears them remains larger than the number he can correctly employ in his own speech or writing (Harris, 1961: 397). Harris defines a person's total meaningful vocabulary as the sum of all the words which he can understand or use correctly, whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing.

It is more important to know a word's meaning than to know how to spell or pronounce it. Vocabulary development and concept development are complementary components of reading. Concept refers to ideas; vocabulary refers to labels for ideas. Knowledge of word meanings is essential to academic achievement. Most standardized reading tests include a separate section to measure vocabulary. This indicates the important role that vocabulary plays in reading comprehension.

In the late 1920's the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation discovered that successful executives in several national firms, such as Eastman Kodak, General Electric, and General Motors, shared

a single characteristic. They scored higher in English vocabulary than any other group tested, including college professors, lawyers, and doctors. Thus, there exists a correlation between vocabulary level and success.

Another study revealed a relationship between low vocabulary and violence. Inner city children and adults in a drug rehabilitation program shared a common characteristic. They scored extremely low in English vocabulary. Researchers concluded that those with poor verbal skills ventilate their frustation through physical action since they are unable to master situations through abstraction and conceptualization.

Both studies show the potency of vocabulary and what effect it can have on the direction a person's life takes. There is a need for strong emphasis on verbal ability. In recent years there has been much publicity on the decline of students' scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT). Mean scores, particularly in the verbal area, have significantly dropped. More and more secondary school students are being classified as "functionally illiterate". Enrollments in college remedial English courses have risen. Indeed, a national crisis in verbal proficiency seems to exist. Educators must seek more efficient ways of improving the verbal skills of students.

The "why" of vocabulary instruction should need no additional explanation. The "how" of vocabulary instruction needs to be examined. In the area of vocabulary instruction, it is often easier to cite techniques that do not work than ones that do(Lehr,1979: 76).

In 1938 Gray and Holmes published the classic study on vocabulary instruction. They studied two approaches - direct and incidental. The content material used was history. Students in the "incidental" group developed a system of language inference. Their "word sense" provided them with a means for deriving meaning. Students in the "direct" group received specific teacher guidance on vocabulary. The "incidnetal" group read more material, but the "direct" group showed greater growth in vocabulary. The results of the study showed that wide reading alone is not as effective in promoting the learning of new words as is direct instruction.

Karlin(1964: 118) states that direct study of words in materials read by high school students can be of great help in increasing comprehension and extending reading vocabulary. Jenkins(1942: 349) found that systematic vocabulary teaching improves general reading ability. Skill at decoding the meaning of new words becomes more important as a child progresses through school and words become more difficult. Deciding which method of vocabulary instruction to use is of utmost importance.

Research evidence does not point to a single best approach to teaching vocabulary but rather indicates that a variety of techniques is useful. Vocabulary development is not a one-dimensional process. There are several aspects to such development. The easiest and most frequently used process to discover the meaning of a new word is through context clues. This approach works especially well in the primary grades.

In addition to context clues, another alternative exists for

unlocking word meaning. The introduction of Latin and Greek roots, prefixes, and suffixes can be very beneficial. This is a structural approach. Sixty percent of all English words are derived from Latin. Knowing basic Latin and Greek roots and affixes can greatly aid a reader in decoding. A study conducted by Thompson (Karlin, 1964: 118) demonstrated that students who concentrated on twenty prefixes and fourteen roots showed a mean gain of twenty percent over their pre-test vocabulary score. Tate and Deighton also showed the effectiveness of studying root words as a means of vocabulary growth.

Recently, many school districts have shown a renewed interest in the studying of Latin as a means of improving English vocabulary. Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (FLES) has conducted experiments on teaching Latin to grade school pupils. Of noted success is the FLES program in Washington, D.C. It was found that Latin FLES students who started out with lower reading ability actually came from behind to achieve higher scores on a standardized reading test than students of a greater ability who had not studied Latin (Voight, 1978: 421). In a Los Angeles elementary school program, Latin instruction was provided by an itinerant Latin teacher for as little as fifteen minutes a day for one year. The results showed increases of as much as one year in reading level and eight months in word knowledge for students who had been classified as low-achieving(Lehr,1979: 78). Scanlan(1975: 45) states that "the effect which Latin has on language ability is immense". In 1971 the Department of Foreign Languages concluded

that the positive effects on verbal skills due to one year of Latin instruction far surpass the benefits derived from two or even three years of French or Spanish instruction(Scanlan, 1975: 45).

Jenkins(1942: 349) attempted to determine the relative effectiveness of four methods of vocabulary study. One group was taught how to analyze words through acquiring a knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and root words. This method proved to be superior for children of average and above-average achievement. Poor students may be confused by the method. Pupils of average and superior ability enjoy finding the meaning of "hard" words. Jenkins concluded that the growth of thought, as measured by written expression, seemed to be improved most by the prefix, suffix, and word root method especially for the superior student.

Harris(1961: 416) believes that a knowledge of the meanings of the more common Latin roots is unquestionably helpful in attacking unknown words at a mature level. A fairly high level of mental ability is required in order to understand a generalized meaning and to apply it in particular situations. According to Harris, such a level of thought is probably not reached by the average student below the ninth or tenth grade level. In the lower grades only the brightest pupils are likely to be able to profit from the Latin approach. The use of affixes and root words in figuring out the meaning of new words is criticized because it gives the individual only a literal meaning of the word. Word analysis reveals a meaning of a word but not that word's shades of meaning(Weintraub,1968: 174).

Motivation is a very important consideration in maintaining interest in vocabulary study. The teacher's emphasis should be on the importance of words in expressing ideas. Students' attitudes toward words must be changed. The teacher's task is to create in his students the feeling that mastery of words is essential for survival in our world. Bruland(1975: 34) stresses the factor of utility in vocabulary development. This encompasses such questions as, "Does the student need to learn the words he is being asked to learn? What is the probability that he will meet and need these words again?"

The idea of a prescriptive list is a turnoff to students. Often negative feelings are generated by someone else's list. Allow and encourage the students to maintain their own word lists. The underlying motive should be a natural curiosity for words. An atmosphere of "play" with words should prevail. Once a week have the students turn in on an index card the new words which they encountered and learned. Let each student share with the rest of the class his "favorite" new word.

When using a structural approach to vocabulary development, the importance of context must not be overlooked. If a person can use a word correctly in context, his mastery of that word is better assured than if he can merely answer a multiple choice question about the word's definition. Using the new words in sentences is essential. Evaluation by peers is a good method to use in checking the correctness of the sentences. If another student can correctly state back to the writer the meaning of the word used,

this indicates that the student has understood the word and can communicate its meaning to others.

In using Latin and Greek elements to teach vocabulary, process should be stressed. Learning should come first and then mastery of those words and roots. The teacher may provide a list of the most common roots, prefixes, and suffixes. The students should not be required to memorize these elements. Exercises for learning and applying these stems and affixes are needed. Each student could be assigned a set of root words for which to find derivatives during his weekly reading activities. The students may combine forms to make up their own words and then ckeck to see if they are indeed real words. Therefore, students can construct new words and break down unfamiliar words. If emphasis is placed on the process involved, learning the roots will be a natural result.

Examples of activities to use follow:

I) From the roots listed below, determine an appropriate word that will complete each sentence:

ject= throw loqu,locut=speak duc,duct=lead

1. The president of the student council made an _____ plea for a new library.
2. An atmosphere that contains many distractions is not _____ to learning.
3. Actors who aspire to the stage must learn to _____ their voices to the farthest reaches of the theater.

II) From the list given

1. Can you find a word that means "to carry across country"?
2. Can you find a word that means "written onto a letter after it is signed"?
3. Can you find a word that means "a form of government through the power of the people"?

III)Build a family of words from one of the roots.

For example, porta=carry

porter, import, export, report, deport, transport, portable

IV)Circle the root stem in each of the underlined words.

1. The soldiers completed their mission and returned to camp.
2. "Good will" is an intangible asset for which businessmen are are willing to pay large sums of money.
3. Both major political parties seek converts to their points of view.

V)Find the root word and meaning of these words:

alleviate	annual
salutary	verbatim
subterranean	abbreviate
credential	contemporary
malice	nocturnal
deist	soliloquy
dormant	eloquent
agrarian	tenacious
corpulent	ventilation
advocate	interrogative
solvent	moratorium
transmarine	accelerate
docile	magnanimous
patrimony	disparity

Introducing students to the backgrounds of words can fire an interest in language. Dictionary skills will be learned from a study of etymology. Students are oten confused by the bracketed odd-looking marks and abbreviations that appear after words in the dictionary. Within these brackets is the word's history. The symbols used can easily be taught (e.g., Gr=Greek, L=Latin, G=German, fr=descended from, <?=origin uncertain). Students will be fasciated at the origin of words if the teacher properly guides them. Activities dealing with etymology can be used to introduce new words in math, science, social studies, music, or art. Almost all scientific terminology is derived from Latin. Medicine and pharmacy make use of Latin in their terminology. The symbols of the chemical elements are based on Latin (e.g., Ag=argentum-silver; Au=aurum-gold; Fe=ferrum-iron). Many students are very interested in these fields and can be taught the Latin behind the English meanings.

Mythology can also be used to teach vocabulary. Students will enjoy hearing the stories and this will help them to remember the words and expressions. Phrases, such as Midas touch, halcyon days, bacchanalian revel, and Achilles heel, are often referred to in literature. Teaching the meaning of these expressions can be fun both for the teacher and students.

Systematic vocabulary instruction accelerates reading progress. Vocabulary instruction improves one's thought processes. It provides progress in originality, organization, and choice of words. Creating the conditions for vocabulary development is the responsibility of

all teachers, not just the reading, Latin, or English teacher. Scanlan feels that the solution to the crisis in vocabulary lies in increased reading and direct vocabulary instruction with "Latin being almost a sine qua non." The author of this paper does not foresee the reinstatement of Latin into the school curriculum, but believes that much benefit can be gained from studying English words via Latin. All techniques in vocabulary building have their drawbacks. Directed vocabulary instruction utilizing numerous techniques appears to be the most promising approach. Incorporating Latin in all subject areas has much to offer to the development of English vocabulary.

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